

Moulds

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better, he receives another letter. Just as the other, he reads this one over and over until the letter is worn. He knows she received his letters and cried when she read them. He sneaks off to shed a tear, knowing he can't let anyone see him or they will think he is weak. When he is done he returns to the real world.

He received another letter, but it wasn't from his girlfriend. It was from the U.S. Army telling him he is going home. He is overwhelmed with joy and shouts out for all to hear. He knows he

will be going home to see her.

He begins to count down the days until departure. Two weeks before he leaves, the unthinkable happens, a surprise attack. He and his comrades are under fire, and he wonders if he will ever make it home.

Just as he thinks the going is getting tough, he gets going. He is now fighting for the right to go home. He remembers his roots and all the people back home. He isn't scared anymore and now he has a will to fight. He is like a wild man going wide open at all times. When dusk falls, the battle is over and the minds of many are at ease.

One week until he leaves and he can't wait. He is champing at the bit to return home, not only as a hero, but as a citizen.

The day finally arrives and he boards the plane to depart. A general gives a lovely speech but he is too excited to listen. He knows that in fewer than seven hours, he will be in the arms of his girl.

The plane comes to rest on the tarmac and he is the first one off. As he steps off, all he can see is her. The sun is setting behind her and she looks like an angel. He wraps his huge tired arms around her and lifts her off the ground. As he sets her down, he hears her sweet voice, and knows all is well.

NAS

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NAS Meridian was upgraded to a Major Shore Command in October 1982. In March 1984, it was one of 15 installations chosen for the Department of Defense Model Installation Program.

The Regional Counterdrug Training Academy was established in 1992. Operated by the Mississippi National Guard, it provides counterdrug training for civilian law enforcement officers from several states including Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama and Georgia. The academy is congressionally funded through the Department of Defense.

On Oct. 17, 1997, 1st Lt. Karen Fuller Tribbett received her "Wings of Gold," becoming the first female strike pilot in the U.S. Marine Corps.

The G.V. "Sonny" Montgomery Naval Reserve Center Meridian opened on July 15, 2000. It includes classrooms, an auditorium and conference rooms.

The main base of NAS Meridian occupies more than 8,000 acres of land with an additional 4,000 acres at Joe Williams Field and its target area known as SEARAY.

Sheltered by God's loving hand ...

Cheri Barry, executive director of the Key Chapter of the American Red Cross in Meridian, wrote this letter to U.S. troops serving in Iraq during the 2004 holiday season. The Key Chapter of the American Red Cross serves Clarke, Kemper, Lauderdale, Leake, Newton, Neshoba and Scott counties.



Barry

During 2004, the chapter sent packages to troops in Iraq to remind them of their hometowns. The chapter set up shelters for people who tried to escape the wrath of Hurricane Ivan in September, and moved to a new, more spacious location in Meridian in November.

To our treasured troops,

This is an ideal time to reflect and be thankful for the past and the strength you have given us as a nation. We have been so touched by our servicemen and women and their dedication to our country in supporting a cause.

As we all know, 2004 offered more than its share of challenges.

Each of our men and women of the Armed Forces have given so much to each of us. We thank you for your strength in risking your lives. We thank you for your guidance and your dedication to our country. And, we thank you for your love of your nation.

We pray that each of you will be sheltered by God's loving hand and will return safely home to your families.

The Key Chapter of the American Red Cross is so proud to be a part of the Armed Forces Emergency Network. We work each day with you and your families in an effort to help your families cope with separation and other special needs.

Each of our volunteers and staff hopes for your safe return home.

Sincerely,

Cheri Barry,
executive director
Key Chapter of the
American Red Cross